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WATER OUTLOOK FOR WIMMERA RELEASED

The CSIRO report *Water Availability in the Wimmera* was released today by the Department of the Environment and Water Resources.

The report is the third in a series covering the entire Murray-Darling Basin commissioned by the Prime Minister and Murray-Darling Basin state Premiers at the November 2006 Water Summit.

The Wimmera region in western Victoria forms part of the southern edge of the Murray-Darling Basin and covers three per cent of the total area of the Basin. About 50,000 people live in the region which is based around the terminal Wimmera River, Avon River and Yarriambiack Creek.

Major land uses are broad acre cropping of cereals, pulses and oilseeds, and dryland livestock grazing. There is around 6000 ha of irrigated cropping, largely vine fruits, pastures and orchards, with a small area of plantation forestry.

The region includes Lake Hindmarsh, a wetland of national significance and Victoria's largest freshwater lake, and Lake Albacutya, a wetland of international importance.

The CSIRO's 'best' estimate of the likely range of future climate outcomes by 2030 is a 17 per cent fall in long-term average annual runoff leading to a 21 per cent reduction in water availability. This is less severe than a continuation of the climate of the last 10 years.

However, there is considerable uncertainty in the climate predictions for 2030 arising from different climate models and different global warming scenarios. Extreme estimates range from a 47 per cent reduction to a one per cent increase in long-term average annual runoff.

Information in the report will be used to develop the new sustainable diversion limit for the river systems in the Basin, which is a key responsibility of the new Murray-Darling Basin Authority under the *Water Act 2007*.

The integrated surface water and groundwater sustainable diversion limit will be part of the Basin-wide water plan the Authority will develop. Along with the CSIRO work, other scientific and economic inputs and consultation with stakeholders will be used to determine the limit.

Reports on other Murray-Darling Basin catchments will be provided progressively through to early 2008. More information about the CSIRO Murray-Darling Basin Sustainable Yields project can be found at www.environment.gov.au/water/mdb/yields.html

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